ISANG YUN

Chamber Symphony I

Tapis pour cordes • Gong-Hu for harp and strings

Rana Park, Harp

Korean Chamber Ensemble • Piotr Borkowski

Isang Yun (1917-1995)

Chamber Symphony I (1987) · Tapis pour cordes (1987) · Gong-Hu for harp and strings (1984)

The Korean composer Isang Yun (Yun Yi Sang) was born in 1917, the son of the distinguished Korean poet Yun Ki Hyon. He showed an early interest in music, and studied at Osaka Conservatory with the Japanese composer Tomojirÿ Ikenouchi, himself the son of a leading Japanese poet and trained in French musical traditions. Isang Yun's participation in secret anti-Japanese activities in the war led to his imprisonment in 1943 and to a subsequent period in hiding. After the war he was able to play a part in the revival of Korean culture, teaching in Chung Mu, Pusan and Seoul. An award from the last city allowed him to travel to Paris, where he studied from 1956 to 1957 with Pierre Revel, and thereafter for a year at the Berlin Musikhochschule with Boris Blacher, Josef Rufer and Reinhard Schwarz-Schilling. The meetings at Darmstadt provided a formative influence, and there were performances of his works there, and in Cologne, Hamburg and Berlin. By 1964 he was again in Berlin, on the invitation of the Ford Foundation, and in 1966 his orchestral composition *Réak* (Ritual Music) was given its première at Donaueschingen, an occasion that secured Yun's international reputation. His abduction to Seoul by agents of the South Korean régime of Chung Hee Park in 1967 led to international protest at his imprisonment and he was eventually, in 1969, granted an amnesty and allowed to return to Germany as a political refugee. He taught at the Hanover Musikhochschule and from 1970 at the parallel institution in Berlin. In Germany he held a position of some distinction, receiving a number of awards, while in North Korea he was honoured by the establishment of an institute bearing his name. He died in Berlin in 1995.

Isang Yun did much to encourage contemporary music in North and South Korea, and his students included members of the younger generation of Korean composers, who worked with him in Hanover and in Berlin. His aim as a composer was to provide a synthesis of East and West, developing essentially Korean ideas through Western instruments and avantgarde techniques. From the 1960s he began to refine a system of composition that he derived from oriental heterophony, a procedure that leads to monophony, and, in the music of Isang Yun, to what he described as *Haupttöne*, an essentially linear approach, as he pointed out. He explains how traditionally every tone starts with a grace note and when it is established it gradually takes on vibrato, leading to an explosion of sound, a final ornament and a continuation on another level. At the same time his work was influenced by his political ideals and desire for Korean unification, by elements of Korean and Chinese culture and Taoist philosophy. His many compositions include four operas, the first two based on the work of the twelfth century Yuan dynasty poet and playwright Ma Chi Yuan.

Gong-Hu dates from 1984 and is dedicated to the harpist Ursula Holliger, who gave the first performance in Lucerne in 1985 with the Camerata Bern directed by the oboist, composer and conductor Heinz Holliger, for whom Isang Yun wrote his last work, the *Quartet for Oboe and String Trio*, first performed four days after the composer's death. The *konghou*, to use the modern system of transliteration of Chinese, is the Chinese harp, introduced into China from Persia during the Eastern Han dynasty, and now less frequently used in China. It was adopted in Korea and the famous *Song of the Konghou*, a Korean song, became part of Chinese repertoire when it was re-introduced into China during the Han dynasty, an example of reverse acculturation. *Gong-Hu* is scored for three first and three second violins, three violas, three cellos and a double bass, with solo harp, which opens the work with ascending chords. The work demands considerable virtuosity from the harpist, with a cadenza-like passage before its closing section.

Tapis pour cordes, written in 1987, the year in which Isang Yun celebrated his seventieth birthday, is scored for a string quintet, or optionally, as here, for

string orchestra. Isang Yun makes use of oriental techniques in a closely woven texture that employs characteristic elements of his compositional language in an effective work that appeals immediately to the listener.

The first of Isang Yun's two *Chamber Symphonies* was also written in 1987 in response to a commission from the city of Gütersloh, where it had its first performance in 1988 by the German Chamber Philharmonic Frankfurt/Main directed by Yoram David. It is scored, very traditionally, for pairs of oboes and horns and strings, but these instruments are treated in the composer's own idiosyncratic musical language, with ornamentation, quarter tones, divisions of the strings and dynamic patterns that accord with his stated principles of musical structure. The work is in a continuous single movement.

Keith Anderson

Rana Park

Rana Park received her M.M. and D.M.A. from the celebrated Juilliard School. Her début recital took place at Carnegie Hall in New York and she has performed with the KBS Symphony Orchestra, the Korean Chamber Ensemble and the St Petersburg Chamber Orchestra. She has given recitals in New York, Aspen and in many cities in Korea including Seoul. She frequently performs works by Korean composers and teaches at Seoul National University, the Korean National University of Arts and the Seoul Arts High School.

The Korean Chamber Ensemble

The Korean Chamber Ensemble, founded in 1965 in Seoul by cellist Bong-Cho Jeon, quickly became a leading chamber group in the country. Since 1979, when Min Kim became its new director, the ensemble has been establishing a growing international reputation by embarking on numerous international tours to increasing critical and popular acclaim. It has given over 450 concerts in Korea, the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, China and Singapore. Its nine-city tour of the United States and Canada in 1995, to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the group's inception, received outstanding reviews from such prestigious publications as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Toronto Star*. In 2000 the group successfully performed in a special concert at the UN General Assembly Hall where it was designated as a UN Chamber Orchestra. In 2001 it went on its third European tour that included a concert, a first for a Korean artistic group, in the Chamber Music Hall of the Berlin Philharmonic, home of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The critics praised the ensemble as a first class orchestra with resilient tonal colours and precise ensemble work. The group has released twelve CDs, encompassing a wide range of repertoire, which have established a new standard of excellence in the field of classical music in Korea.

The Korean Chamber Ensemble celebrated its fortieth Anniversary in 2005.

Piotr Borkowski

Piotr Borkowski, a pupil of Boguslaw Madey, was born in Warsaw in 1963 and graduated from the Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw. He made his début as conductor at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1986. A few years later, in 1993, he studied conducting with Hans Graf in Vienna under a Meisterkurse für Musik scholarship. In 1995 his studies with Myung-Whun Chung and Ilija Musin at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena resulted in a Diploma di Merito. He has conducted many orchestras and chamber groups from Poland, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, North America, South Korea and the Ukraine and toured extensively in France and South Korea with various orchestras. From 1996 to 2001 he was a professor of conducting at the Hyosung Catholic University in Daegu, South Korea. Since 2001 he has held the same position at Suwon University. At the same time he regularly conducts among other orchestras the Korean Symphony, the Daegu City Symphony Orchestra, the Bucheon Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Seoul Philharmonic, the Busan Sinfonietta and the Korean Chamber Ensemble.

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Although imprisoned for his anti-Japanese activities during the Second World War and obliged to live as a political refugee in Germany in the late 1960s, the Korean-born composer Isang Yun played an important part in the development of music in Korea. He exercised influence over a generation of younger composers, many of whom studied with him in his adopted country. Yun's own compositions reflect a synthesis of East and West, in a technique of writing that, while contemporary, draws on older Chinese and Korean traditions.

Isang YUN
(1917-1995)

1	Chamber Symphony I (1987)	26:53
2	Tapis pour cordes (1987)	8:23
3	Gong-Hu for harp and strings (1984)	25:47

KOREAN CHAMBER ENSEMBLE 1965~

Rana Park, Harp

Korean Chamber Ensemble • Piotr Borkowski

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